

GAMES
NEWS■ **PARIAH TOURNAMENT**

Microsoft and IGUK gaming centres have joined forces to offer a new competition that uses the PC and Xbox versions of Pariah. Rather than the usual winner-takes-all approach, anybody who enters the competition wins raffle tickets depending on the number of 'frags' they have scored. At the end of each month, one ticket is chosen, giving everyone a chance to win something. The tournaments are taking place now. For more information, visit www.iguk.org.

■ **GOLF LAUNCHPAD ON ITS WAY**

Blue Nova International has announced the USB Golf Launchpad controller.

This controller, which has been designed specifically for use with golf simulations,

lets you use your own golf clubs. You just have to strike the special ball, and the sensor works out the direction. As well as playing games, the tee and golf ball can be removed from the set and taken to the golf course, where together they can be used as a sophisticated swing analyser. Pricing and availability have yet to be announced, but we'll be reviewing one as soon as it becomes available.

REVIEW **ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME**SEGA
The Matrix: Online

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS www.thematrixonline.co.uk

Humans jacked into a giant computer simulation: is it the plot of *The Matrix*, or a Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) game? The answer is both, as *The Matrix: Online* debuts on the PC.

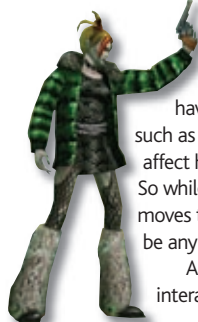
Produced by the Wachowski brothers, the game picks up where the films left off. It doesn't explain what happened in the films' climax, but all that's important is that there's a truce between humanity and the machines, and sentient programs are vying for control of the online world.

After an installation and patching process that downloads a whopping 1GB file, you're plugged into *The Matrix*. Character design, as with other MMO games, is an essential part of the process. It's a shame that there's not much choice in the way you look, and you'll often run into doppelgangers.

In the skills section, you shape the way your character will perform. *The Matrix* is more flexible than many of the games we've played. Rather than having to pick a dedicated character class, such as

warrior or wizard, you can load and unload different sets of abilities from any hardwired telephone point. However, you have to choose predefined abilities, such as Belief and Perception, which affect how good you are at certain skills. So while you can unload your combat moves to become a coder, you might not be any good at the new role.

As this is an MMO game, you can interact freely with other players,



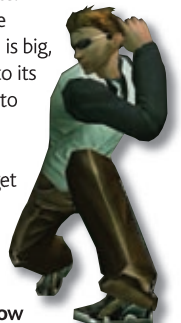
The Matrix: Online provides all the pace and action of the films, but it's not the easiest of games to master

although you can fight them only if they agree to combat. Your initial plan should be to try the first set of missions to gain experience. These start off being repetitive, but they do improve. There are two kinds of missions: single-shot missions and plot devices. The plot devices help unfold the story built into the game and even trigger cut scenes.

We were a little disappointed by the blocky graphics. Also, the control system is big, cumbersome and confusing to use due to its large range of icons. It takes a long time to master properly and, even then, you can lose track of the task you want to do.

As with other online games, you'll get out of it what you put in. If you loved the films, you'll probably love the game. But the control system and repetitive missions will test your patience.

David Ludlow



✓ Dedicated plot; can redefine character's abilities

✗ Repetitive missions; cumbersome control system

REQUIREMENTS Windows ME or above, 512MB RAM, 64MB DirectX 9.0 graphics, 1.4GHz Pentium 4 processor, 7GB disk space.
Product code B0000A1P7D

HOTLIST **FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER**

Half-Life 2

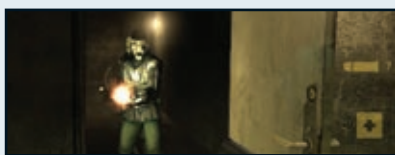
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.cdwow.comDETAILS www.half-life2.com

Half-Life 2 was a year overdue, but it was well worth the wait. It is one of the most involving first-person shooters we've ever played and it will quickly drag you into the plot. It is designed with lush graphics that run well, even on older systems, making it a game that everyone can enjoy. Only an annoying online registration process mars the game.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 1.2GHz processor, 256MB RAM (2GB, 512MB recommended), 4.5GB disk space.
Product code B00009ATWC

HOTLIST **SIM AND BATTLE GAME**

Stronghold 2

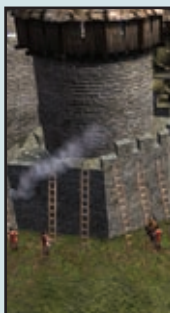
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.comDETAILS www.stronghold2.com

The sequel to 2001's sleeper hit, *Stronghold 2* takes all the castle-building fun of the first game and makes it even better. This time around you can choose to play the sim game, where you must keep your citizens happy, or the war game, where you battle against the computer for control of the map. There's loads of gameplay in this innovative game, which should keep you busy for hours at a time.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Pentium 4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB graphics card, 2.5GB disk space.
Product code B0007GIXOW

HOTLIST **ONLINE ADVENTURE GAME**

City of Heroes

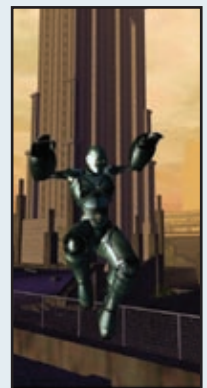
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18, then £9 monthly

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS <http://uk.cityofheroes.com>

If you've always longed to clamber into a spandex suit and fight crime, *City of Heroes* is the game for you. The internet adventure puts you in a city full of other human-controlled heroes. There are plenty of missions and monthly updates. This game is lots of fun, although gameplay may be too simplistic for some.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98, 800MHz Pentium III, 256MB RAM, 2GB disk space, net access. **Product code** B0006IS3NW





REVIEW ACTION GAME

EIDOS Lego Star Wars

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.comDETAILS www.eidos.co.uk

If you took your family to see *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* at the cinema recently and it left you or your progeny in need of more Jedi-based antics, this game could be just the thing for you.

Lego Star Wars takes the Lego toys and makes an action adventure game out of them. On the surface it sounds like another tired marketing ploy to sell more Lego, but don't judge too quickly. This game has been built with so much care, attention to detail and overall polish that it's guaranteed to put a smile on your face.

It covers all the best bits from the new films, which basically means all the cool lightsaber scenes and none of the romantic stuff. Each segment is introduced by a memorable scene from the film, but rendered entirely in Lego with added comic touches. The exquisite presentation is supported by the full majesty of the *Star Wars* soundtrack.

Gameplay is a balance of combat, platforms and puzzles. There are around 50 characters to unlock and play, and at least two are always available. You can switch between available characters at any time, and their special abilities allow the player to solve puzzles. For example, R2 astromech droids can open locked doors, while the Jedi can use the force to manipulate distant objects. A second player can join or leave at any time, encouraging cooperative play. Two players can progress through the game more quickly and smoothly than one, and it's twice the fun.

The only downsides are the need for a USB joystick and the short time it takes to complete the game. Still, there is a lot of replay value; using different characters allows access to other areas.

A great game for children between the ages of five and 12, and *Star Wars* fans of any age.

Seth Barton



✓ Great graphics and sound; cooperative mode

✗ Joypad required; limited play length

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1GHz processor, 256MB RAM, DirectX 9.0c compatible 32MB graphics card, 500MB disk space. **Product code** B0007Y71M



It sounds like a bizarre idea, but Lego Star Wars helps to bring some much-needed sunshine to the dark side

REVIEW 3D ACTION

CODEMASTERS Worms 4 Mayhem

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £19 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.tesco.co.ukDETAILS www.codemasters.co.uk

When Worms was released a decade ago, it was a fresh, funny take on the tired old turn-based fighting games. However, Worms 4 just feels like a rehash of the same formula. While the 3D graphics give the game a shiny, newer look, the gameplay remains the same: you and your opponent take it in turns to control each worm and its range of weaponry.

The original program set a high precedent by including bizarre but fun weapons such as sheep. Worms 4 tries to match this, but ends up in barrel-scrapping territory with the inflatable scouser and Fatkins strike. The new Weapons Factory, which allows you to design your own weapons, is interesting for a while but it is hardly ground-breaking.

In an effort to give the game more appeal, there's a new story mode, where you have to complete a set of missions against computer-controlled teams. However, the only difference between a straight worm fight and these levels is that the missions might ask you to collect a crate or two. The 3D view looks pretty, but it can make it very difficult to control the worms. It took us a while to get used to it and stop our worms falling to their deaths.

At the heart of the game there lies a very simple idea that's still immense fun to play. The multiplayer options, where you can play against fellow humans, are still brilliant fun and it is here that the game excels.

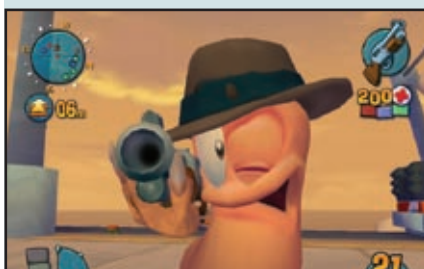
No two games are the same and the random factors, such as how wind affects cluster bombs and the like, maintain the enjoyment factor. If you've never played Worms before, there is a hell of a lot to like. But – and it's a big but – if you own any of the previous Worms, 2D or 3D, there's very little here that you won't have seen before.

David Ludlow

✓ Colourful graphics; good fun

✗ It's all been done before

REQUIREMENTS Windows XP/2000, 2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM. **Product code** B0007KN40G



If you ever thought that worms were slightly boring creatures that just wiggled a lot, prepare to be amazed

REVIEW FIRST-PERSON STRATEGY

UBISOFT Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS www.ubisoft.com

We're always a little suspicious of war games that claim to bring new realism to the genre. After all, even pixel-perfect graphics don't negate the fact that you're acting out feats of horrific, desperate violence from the comfort of your home computer for entertainment. Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30 claims to be more accurate than other World War II shooters, and makes a good job of encouraging a less gung-ho attitude to Nazi hunting.

Unlike most first-person war shooters, where you're encouraged to fight alone, Brothers in Arms uses a team-based approach to warfare. Charging down the enemy is virtually impossible; instead you must order your troops into cover, get them to suppress the enemy by firing on them and then manoeuvre around for the kill. The weapons at your disposal are remarkably hard to aim, as there's no crosshair, and there is no way to regain lost health. The game does make the distinction between shooting when crouching, when you can aim your weapon, and firing from the hip while running, which is virtually impossible.

These elements work well, creating a decent tension to each level as you struggle to stay behind cover and stay alive. It's a shame that the same amount of thought wasn't applied to the game maps. The levels are designed to be approached in a single, linear way, but before long you'll notice that most enemies can be defeated in the same repetitive manner. The graphics aren't perfect, either. Your fellow troops look strangely lifeless, with waxwork-like faces; at one point, we were amused to see that one of our soldiers had taken to moonwalking around the French countryside.

Brothers in Arms is a very playable variation on the usual World War II theme. If there had been fewer linear maps, it would have been excellent.

Tom Royal

✓ Discourages the usual Nazi-charging approach in favour of more realistic battles

✗ Levels are linear; 'fix, fire and flank' tactics become repetitive

REQUIREMENTS 1GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 5GB disk space, 32MB DirectX 9c compatible graphics. **Product code** B00023HUNA



Possibly the only first-person strategy game to pay homage to music giants Dire Straits and Chris Rea